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TOWARDS INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: MODELS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR DEVELOPING ESOL LEARNERS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN IRELAND

György Nagy 

University of Limerick, Ireland

gyorgy.nagy@ul.ie

György Nagy is a Hungarian PhD student in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). His research explores the potential in materials for developing learners' intercultural competence in an Irish context. György has been active in TESOL for many years.

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gyorgy.nagy@ul.ie

Abstract

Without the study of culture, second language acquisition is not complete (Kramsch, 1993). Teaching about culture raises the learners' awareness of the target culture and compares it with the home culture, providing an intercultural competence (Ibid). Due to the growing number of immigrants in Ireland (CSO Ireland, 2017), there is also an increasing number of immigrant learners in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) providers in Ireland. The successful integration of these learners into Irish society depends on the successful development of their intercultural competence. This paper aims to provide insight into the models and frameworks for developing intercultural competence through the use of English language teaching materials in an Irish context. The paper involves presenting four models-based frameworks. The frameworks consider increasing content knowledge, sharpening mental skills, fostering attitudinal skills and increasing awareness which constitute the four fundamental components of intercultural competence. The paper endeavours to contribute to the vibrant global conversation among professionals about how to develop intercultural competence. Most significantly, however, it attempts to support teachers in incorporating cultural elements into their teaching materials effectively and appropriately.

Keywords: English for Speakers of Other Languages, Irish culture, intercultural competence, teaching materials

1. Introduction

Modern migratory tendencies in Europe and worldwide have led to annual increases in immigration into Ireland (CSO Ireland, 2017) with a projection that in the future, Brexit will intensify the impact on Ireland's demography (Varadkar, 2017). This trend will inevitably result in more and more immigrant learners in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classrooms throughout the country. The successful integration of these learners into Irish society depends on the successful development of their intercultural competence and this, in turn, relies on the teaching about Irish culture. Based on a definition of culture from G. Hofstede, G. J. Hofstede and M. Minkov (2010), Irish culture is the way members of a group of Irish people, living in Ireland, do things and the way these members see the things they do. Drawing on this conceptualisation of culture, intercultural competence for immigrant ESOL learners in Ireland is the ability to do, see and even feel things the way the Irish do. This competence is essential to function well in a society that is new to a person. Functioning well refers to functioning *effectively* and functioning *appropriately* (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006, p. 12, emphasis in original). Functioning effectively means achieving results within Irish society and function appropriately means achieving the results in a way which is suitable and right in the eyes of the Irish.

This study looks at how to develop immigrant learners' intercultural competence in an Irish ESOL classroom. Intercultural competence pertains to development through the

components within intercultural competence. Using the models from Byram (1997), Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002), Deardorff (2006) and Fantini (2009), there are four components, or dimensions, of intercultural competence. They are content knowledge, mental skills, attitudinal skills and awareness (see Figure 1). *Content knowledge* is knowledge of acquired cultural information; *mental skills* is the ability to process cultural information; *attitudinal skills* is the ability to value cultural information; *awareness* is a perception of learning in the domains of content knowledge, mental skills and attitudinal skills.

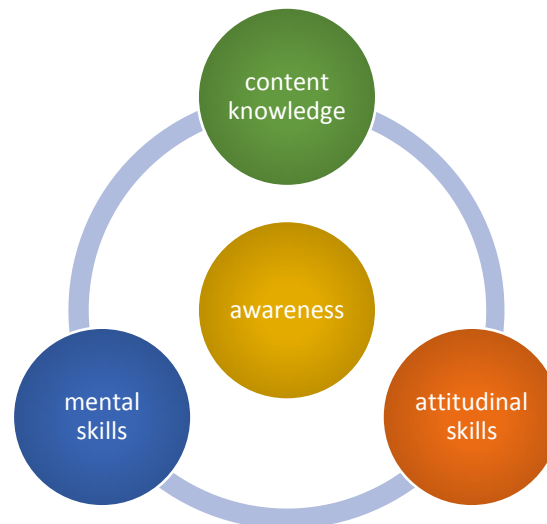


Figure 1. Components of intercultural competence

The ESOL teacher's most utilised classroom tool is materials. Based on Mishan's (2005) definition, language teaching materials are *texts* which can be either written or audio, where *visuals* can be still or moving, and *tasks* are based on the texts and visuals.

Using the concept of ESOL materials and the four components of intercultural competence in an ESOL classroom, this paper advocates the use of the four model-based frameworks. These frameworks are designed to increase the potential for deepening content knowledge through texts and visuals, sharpening mental skills and fostering attitudinal skills through tasks and increasing awareness through the material as a whole. Each framework is intended to help ESOL teachers incorporate culture into their own-devised teaching materials or to evaluate their existing teaching materials and amend them as necessary. In this way, teachers can provide a more significant potential for the development of their learners' intercultural competence in the language classroom. As the research that utilises these frameworks is being carried out in Ireland, the frameworks are applied to an Irish context.

2. Deepening content knowledge

The framework for deepening content knowledge through texts and visuals relies on two models. They are termed as ‘the pentagon of culture’ and ‘the fields of culture’. This framework is designed to increase the potential in the texts and visuals to *acquire* cultural information in a *comprehensive* and *detailed* way.

2.1 Pentagon of culture

The pentagon of culture is the expansion of the three Ps (products, practices, perspectives) approach to culture (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2015). It consists of five broad areas: geography, people, products, practices and perspectives (see Figure 2).

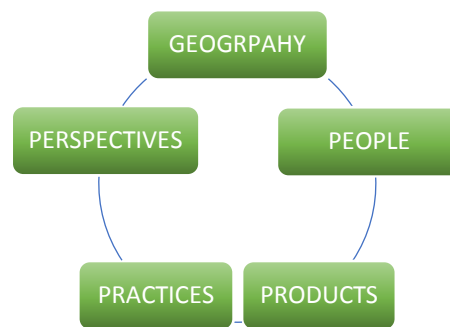


Figure 2. The pentagon of culture

By addressing these five areas, a comprehensive description of any cultural item can be ensured. As comparison lies at the heart of cultural learning, the pentagon of culture is an excellent tool for comprehensively comparing two cultures. Figure 3 shows an example of comparing 'tea' in Ireland with 'tea' in Hungary using the pentagon of culture.



Figure 3. Comparing 'tea' in Ireland with 'tea' in Hungary using the pentagon of culture

2.2 Fields of culture

The five broad areas of the pentagon of culture can further be divided into several 'fields'. The fields of culture are the expansion of the minimum areas of cultural content (Byram & Morgan, 1994) in teaching materials (see Table 1). Each field has substantial sub-fields, for instance, cultural heritage includes dance, music and literature; social identity involves age, gender, socio-economic status, language use. (See Table 2 for more details). By addressing the fields of culture, the opportunity for a detailed description of any cultural item is ensured.

Table 1. *The fields of culture*

geography	social identity	rites of passage
history	social groups	beliefs
institutions	social interactions	norms
cultural heritage	behaviours	values
physical items	socialisation	meanings

national identity	life cycles	generalisations
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2.3 Framework for deepening content knowledge

The framework for deepening content knowledge through texts and visuals consists of two main parts. Firstly, the five broad areas of the pentagon of culture which ensures a comprehensive description of cultural items. Secondly, the fields of culture with their sub-fields assigned to the relevant areas of the pentagon of culture which ensures a detailed description of cultural elements (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Framework for deepening content knowledge through texts and visuals*

□ Geography	□ People	□ Products	□ Practices	□ Perspectives
natural <input type="checkbox"/> landforms <input type="checkbox"/> water bodies <input type="checkbox"/> climate <input type="checkbox"/> weather <input type="checkbox"/> animals <input type="checkbox"/> plants human <input type="checkbox"/> countries <input type="checkbox"/> counties <input type="checkbox"/> cities, towns <input type="checkbox"/> villages, settlements <input type="checkbox"/> population	<input type="checkbox"/> national identity social identity <input type="checkbox"/> race <input type="checkbox"/> gender <input type="checkbox"/> age <input type="checkbox"/> ethnicity <input type="checkbox"/> socioeconomic status <input type="checkbox"/> political affiliation <input type="checkbox"/> religious affiliation <input type="checkbox"/> language use social groups <input type="checkbox"/> membership groups <input type="checkbox"/> reference groups	tangible <input type="checkbox"/> cultural heritage <input type="checkbox"/> physical items intangible <input type="checkbox"/> cultural heritage <input type="checkbox"/> history <input type="checkbox"/> language <input type="checkbox"/> institutions <input type="checkbox"/> life cycles <input type="checkbox"/> other non-physical items	social interactions <input type="checkbox"/> verbal <input type="checkbox"/> non-verbal socialisation <input type="checkbox"/> family <input type="checkbox"/> school <input type="checkbox"/> work <input type="checkbox"/> peer group behaviours <input type="checkbox"/> routines <input type="checkbox"/> manners rites of passage <input type="checkbox"/> ceremonies <input type="checkbox"/> rituals	<input type="checkbox"/> beliefs <input type="checkbox"/> values <input type="checkbox"/> norms <input type="checkbox"/> meanings <input type="checkbox"/> generalisations

The more complete the table is, the stronger the opportunity is to acquire cultural information in a comprehensive and detailed way as well as to increase awareness.

2.3.1 An example framework for deepening content knowledge

Text

The Claddagh Ring merges the basic 'clasped hand design' of Fede Rings with a heart and a crown signifying Love, Friendship and Loyalty or Fidelity. These rings were kept with great pride as family heirlooms, which were passed lovingly down from mother to daughter on her wedding day. The design has now become very popular internationally, its spread being helped by the vast exodus from Ireland during the Great Famine in 1845-1849. The simplicity of the ring and the symbolism it conveys make it the perfect gift for a friend or loved one. (Excerpt from Unit 18 in Jordan, M. (2005) *Learning English in Ireland*, Dublin: Celtic Publications.)

Visual



Table 3. Examination of a text and a visual about an Irish cultural artefact

v Geography	v People	v Products	v Practices	v Perspectives
natural <input type="checkbox"/> landforms <input type="checkbox"/> water bodies <input type="checkbox"/> climate <input type="checkbox"/> weather <input type="checkbox"/> animals <input type="checkbox"/> plants human <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> countries <input type="checkbox"/> counties <input type="checkbox"/> cities, towns <input type="checkbox"/> villages, settlements <input type="checkbox"/> population	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> national identity social identity <input type="checkbox"/> race <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> gender <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> age <input type="checkbox"/> ethnicity <input type="checkbox"/> socio-economic status <input type="checkbox"/> political affiliation <input type="checkbox"/> religious affiliation <input type="checkbox"/> language use social groups <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> membership groups <input type="checkbox"/> reference groups	tangible <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> cultural heritage <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> physical items intangible <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> cultural heritage <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> history <input type="checkbox"/> language <input type="checkbox"/> institutions <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> life cycles <input type="checkbox"/> other non-physical items	social interactions <input type="checkbox"/> verbal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> non-verbal socialisation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> family <input type="checkbox"/> school <input type="checkbox"/> work <input type="checkbox"/> peer group behaviours <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> routines <input type="checkbox"/> manners rites of passage <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ceremonies <input type="checkbox"/> rituals	<input type="checkbox"/> beliefs <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> values <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> norms <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> meanings <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> generalisations

The example text and visual deal with all five areas of the pentagon of culture: geography, people, products, practices and perspectives. Also, many of fields and sub-fields of culture are considered within this analysis. Country, national identity, gender, age, membership groups, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, physical items, history, life cycles, non-verbal social interactions, family socialisation, routines, ceremonies, values, norms, meanings and generalisations. Consequently, the conclusion is that the example text and visual have great potential to acquire cultural information in a comprehensive and detailed way as well as to increase awareness of Irish culture (see Table 3).

3. Sharpening mental skills

The framework for sharpening mental skills through tasks comprises two models incorporated in the comparative approach to cultural learning. The two models are the previously presented pentagon of culture (see 2.1) and the cognitive learning ladder. This framework is designed to increase the potential in tasks to *process* cultural information in a *complex*, *comprehensive* and *comparative* way.

3.1 Cognitive learning ladder

The cognitive learning ladder is the taxonomy of cognitive learning objectives in educational settings (Anderson, Krathwohl, Airasian, Cruikshank, Mayer, Pintrich, Rath & Wittrock, 2001; Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956) (see Figure 4). It is symbolised as a ladder to be climbed, step by step, to reach the highest step 'safely'. It relies on each step necessarily including the steps that are below it. For example, analysing cultural information (step 4) is not possible without being able to recall (step 1), comprehend (step 2)

and apply (step 3) the information to be analysed. The higher position the cognitive operation of the mind reaches on the ladder, the stronger the possibility is to process cultural information complexly.

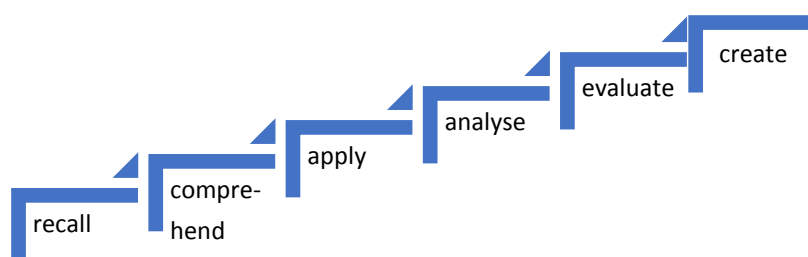


Figure 4. The cognitive learning ladder

Learning about the Claddagh Ring (see 2.3.1) may be used as an example to demonstrate each step of the cognitive learning ladder. ‘Recall’ (step 1) is when the learner recognises the Claddagh Ring. ‘Comprehend’ (step 2) is when the learner understands the symbols and the uses of the ring. ‘Apply’ (step 3) is when the learner gives examples of the uses of the ring in real life situations. ‘Analyse’ (step 4) is when the learner examines the symbols, the history or the uses of the ring. ‘Evaluate’ (step 5) is when the learner judges and critiques the symbols and the uses of the ring. ‘Create’ (step 6) is when the learner designs his or her ring with a similar meaning to that of the Claddagh Ring.

3.2 Framework for sharpening mental skills

The framework for sharpening mental skills through tasks comprises three main components. The components may be summarised as firstly, the steps of the cognitive learning ladder from the lowest to the highest to ensure complexity in the tasks. Secondly, the five areas of the pentagon of culture to provide comprehensiveness in the tasks. Finally, references to Irish cultural information and information from the learner’s own culture to ensure comparison in the tasks (see Table 4).

Table 4. Framework for sharpening mental skills through tasks

MENTAL SKILLS IN		recall	comprehend	apply	analyse	evaluate	create
Irish	geography						
Learner’s							
Irish	people						
Learner’s							
Irish	products						
Learner’s							
Irish	practices						
Learner’s							
Irish	perspectives						
Learner’s							

The more complete the table is, the stronger the opportunity is to process cultural information in a complex, comprehensive and comparative way as well as to increase awareness.

3.2.1 An example framework for sharpening mental skills

Tasks

Compare (Task 1) the Claddagh Ring with a similar traditional artefact for personal use from your own country. Think of (Task 2) similarities and differences, for example: who uses it, when, where and how, and how the people in your country view it.

Table 5. *Examination of tasks on comparing cultural artefacts*

MENTAL SKILLS IN		recall	comprehend	apply	analyse	evaluate	create
Irish	geography					Task 1	Task 2
Learner's						Task 1	Task 2
Irish	people					Task 1	Task 2
Learner's						Task 1	Task 2
Irish	products					Task 1	Task 2
Learner's						Task 1	Task 2
Irish	practices					Task 1	Task 2
Learner's						Task 1	Task 2
Irish	perspectives					Task 1	Task 2
Learner's						Task 1	Task 2

Comparing, Task 1 at the level of 'evaluate', has the potential to provide the learner with an opportunity to judge and critique differences between the Claddagh Ring and a similar artefact from his or her country using all the aspects of the pentagon of culture. Also, the task naturally involves the lower-level cognitive operations from 'recall' to 'apply'. Thinking of differences and similarities, Task 2 at the level of 'create', has the potential to generate ideas and put them together in a systematic way. Task 2 also includes the lower-level cognitive operations from 'recall' to 'evaluate'. It can be concluded that the two tasks have great potential to process cultural information in a complex, comprehensive and detailed way as well as to increase awareness of the Irish and the learner's self (see Table 5).

4. Fostering attitudinal skills

The framework for fostering attitudinal skills through tasks derives two models incorporated in the comparative approach to cultural learning. The two models are the previously presented pentagon of culture (see 2.1) and the affective learning ladder. The application of this framework supports increasing the potential in tasks to *value* cultural information in a *complex, comprehensive* and *comparative* way.

4.1 Affective learning ladder

The affective learning ladder is the taxonomy of affective learning objectives in educational settings (Anderson et al., 2001; Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964) (see Figure 5). It works in the same way as the previously introduced cognitive learning ladder (see 3.1); that is, each step naturally includes all the lower steps. For instance, valuing cultural information (step 4) is not possible without being able to receive (step 1) the information and respond (step 2) to it first. The higher position the affective operation reaches on the ladder, the stronger the possibility is to value cultural information in a complex way.

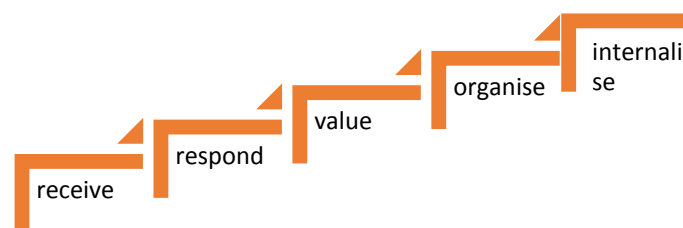


Figure 5. The affective learning ladder

Learning about the Claddagh Ring (see 2.3.1) is taken again as an example to demonstrate each step of the affective learning ladder. ‘Receive’ (step 1) is when the learner is willing to discover the Claddagh Ring – this is motivation. ‘Respond’ (step 2) is when the learner reflects positively on the symbols and the uses of the ring – this is interest. ‘Value’ (step 3) is when the learner accepts the meanings and uses of the ring – this is appreciation. ‘Organise’ (step 4) is when the learner ranks the acquired new values about the ring and integrates them into his or her old value system – this is the development of a life philosophy which might be the highest step to be reached in an ESOL classroom. ‘Internalise’ (step 5) is when the learner lives consistently according to the values of the Claddagh Ring – this is an adjustment.

4.2 Framework for fostering attitudinal skills

The framework for fostering attitudinal skills through tasks consists of three main components. These are the steps of the affective learning ladder from the lowest to the highest to provide complexity in the tasks. Secondly, the five areas of the pentagon of culture to ensure comprehensiveness in the tasks. Finally, references to Irish cultural information and information from the learner’s own culture to ensure comparison in the tasks (see Table 6).

Table 6. Framework for fostering attitudinal skills through tasks

ATTITUDINAL SKILLS IN		receive	respond	value	organise	internalise
Irish	geography					
Learner’s						
Irish	people					
Learner’s						
Irish	products					
Learner’s						
Irish	practices					
Learner’s						
Irish	perspectives					
Learner’s						

The more complete the table is, the stronger the opportunity is to value cultural information in a complex, comprehensive and comparative way as well as to increase awareness.

4.2.1 Example framework for fostering attitudinal skills

Tasks

Compare (Task 1) the Claddagh Ring with a similar traditional artefact for personal use from your own country. Think of (Task 2) similarities and differences, for example: who uses it, when, where and how, and how the people in your country view it.

Table 7. *Examination of tasks on comparing cultural artefacts*

ATTITUDINAL SKILLS IN		receive	respond	value	organise	internalise
Irish	geography			Task 2	Task 1	
Learner's				Task 2	Task 1	
Irish	people			Task 2	Task 1	
Learner's				Task 2	Task 1	
Irish	products			Task 2	Task 1	
Learner's				Task 2	Task 1	
Irish	practices			Task 2	Task 1	
Learner's				Task 2	Task 1	
Irish	perspectives			Task 2	Task 1	
Learner's				Task 2	Task 1	

Comparing, Task 1 at the level of 'organise', has the potential to provide the learner with an opportunity to rank and internalise the moral values connected with the Claddagh Ring and a similar artefact from his or her country looking at all the aspects of the pentagon of culture. The task also involves the lower-level affective operations from 'receive' to 'value'. Thinking of differences and similarities, Task 2 at the level of 'value', has the potential for the appreciation of the moral values of the two cultural artefacts. Task 2 also includes the lower-level affective operations from 'recall' to 'respond'. It can be concluded that the two tasks have great potential to value cultural information in a complex, comprehensive and detailed way as well as to increase awareness of the Irish and the learner's self (see Table 7).

5. Increasing awareness

The framework for increasing awareness of the Irish and the learner's self is based on the findings noted in the frameworks for deepening content knowledge (see 2.3), sharpening mental skills (see 3.2) and fostering attitudinal skills (see 4.2) incorporating a comparative approach to cultural learning. It is designed to increase the potential in the material as a whole for perceptions of *acquiring*, *processing* and *valuing* cultural information.

5.1 Framework for increasing awareness

This very simple, tick-box framework comprises a column for 'awareness of the Irish' and a column for 'awareness of learner's self' with three rows for the findings recorded in the frameworks for content knowledge, mental skills and attitudinal skills domains of intercultural competence (see Table 8). These findings need to be looked at carefully and then, the relevant boxes of the framework need to be ticked if they are present.

Table 8. *Framework for increasing awareness through the material as a whole*

AWARENESS THROUGH	awareness of the Irish	awareness of learner's self
content knowledge		
mental skills		
attitudinal skills		

5.1.1 An example framework for increasing awareness

Table 9. *Examination of a material on cultural artefacts*

AWARENESS THROUGH	awareness of the Irish	awareness of learner's self
content knowledge	✓	
mental skills	✓	✓
attitudinal skills	✓	✓

The text and the visual in the example (see 2.3.1) address an Irish cultural item (the Claddagh Ring) only but the tasks (see 3.2.1 and 4.2.1) address both Irish cultural information and information from the learner's own culture in the domains of cognitive (mental) and affective (attitudinal) learning. Thus, it can be concluded that the material, when considered as a whole, has great potential for promoting perceptions of content knowledge, mental skills and attitudinal skills (see Table 9).

6. Conclusion

Developing immigrant learners' intercultural competence in an ESOL classroom in Ireland is crucial to their successful integration into Irish society. This paper has shown how learners' intercultural competence is developed by improving the four components of intercultural competence with the help of language teaching materials using four practical frameworks. (1) The framework for deepening content knowledge helps to increase the potential in the texts and visuals to acquire cultural information in a comprehensive and detailed way. (2) The framework for sharpening mental skills helps to increase the potential in the tasks to process cultural information in a complex, comprehensive and comparative way. (3) The framework for fostering attitudinal skills helps to increase the potential in the tasks to value cultural information in a complex, comprehensive and comparative way. (4) The framework for increasing awareness of the Irish and the learner's self helps to increase the potential in the material as a whole for perceptions of the learnings in the domains of content knowledge, mental skills and attitudinal skills (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Frameworks for developing intercultural competence

The four frameworks are designed to help to increase the potential in language teaching materials to develop the four components of intercultural competence, and by this,

intercultural competence itself, not only in an ESOL classroom in Ireland but also in any other language classroom around the world.

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